



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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U.S. ARMY SOLDIER FOUND GUILTY OF ALIEN SMUGGLING CHARGES

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton announced that 32-year-old Alejandro Javier Lazos Ortiz, a U.S. Army soldier assigned to Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, faces a maximum of ten years in federal prison after a jury found him guilty of alien smuggling charges.

On Tuesday, the jury convicted Ortiz of one count each of conspiracy to harbor aliens, harboring illegal aliens, and inducing/encouraging illegal aliens to reside in the United States, all for profit. The jury found that Ortiz participated in an alien smuggling operation that was responsible for smuggling more than 100 undocumented aliens from Hidalgo, Mexico, into the United States. The undocumented aliens agreed to pay members of the organization between \$1,500 and \$2,500 each to be smuggled into the United States and transported to various locations.

The alien smuggling organization operated by walking undocumented aliens across the Rio Grande River where they would be housed in one of many stash houses. From there, they would be loaded up into train box cars destined for Tucson. Once in Tucson, they would be driven on to Phoenix, then to Las Vegas, Nevada. From there, many of the illegal aliens traveled to Atlanta, Georgia.

Evidence presented during the two-day trial revealed that Ortiz supported the organization's infrastructure by renting stash houses, providing vehicles for transporting the aliens and by collecting alien smuggling fees. Western Union transaction records showed that between April 2005 and November 2006, Ortiz collected over \$36,000 from 40 different individuals in 15 states including New York, California, Florida, Nevada, Maryland, Georgia, Colorado, Texas and in Mexico.

Ortiz, who remains on bond, is scheduled to be sentenced on June 11, 2007, before United States District Judge David Briones.

In all, more than 15 defendants have been convicted for their roles in this alien smuggling organization. This case was investigated by the Border Enforcement Security Task Force made up of investigators from the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Border Patrol, El Paso County Sheriff's Office and the El Paso Police Department. It is being prosecuted for the government by Assistant United States Attorneys Richard Watts, Brandy Gardes and Chris Blanton.

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